



United States Department of Agriculture



# NEW MEXICO 2022 ANNUAL REPORT



J. XAVIER MONTOYA, STATE CONSERVATIONIST  
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# HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND

USDA Natural Resources  
Conservation Service  
100 Sun Avenue N.E.,  
Suite 602  
Albuquerque, NM 87109  
(505) 761-4402

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/NM](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/NM)



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# NEW MEXICO 2022 ANNUAL REPORT



***The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service provides technical assistance and programs designed to address the natural resource concerns that impact New Mexico's agriculture***



**J. Xavier Montoya  
State Conservationist**

In New Mexico, the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) legacy of "helping people help the land" endures. Through voluntary, locally-led conservation, and practices rooted in sound science, NRCS New Mexico continues to help producers address their resource needs, achieve their long-term goals, and foster a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment.

Throughout FY 22, our team worked tirelessly in concert with our partners to promote conservation efforts for our farmers, ranchers, and landowners. Marked by natural disasters, 2022 was a particularly tough year. Wildfires burned across the state, including the largest wildfire in state history, and then flooding followed. I am proud of the way NRCS New Mexico, as well as our local soil and water conservation districts, other partners, and sponsors, responded and answered the call to help our fellow New Mexicans. I am also proud of how NRCS New Mexico maintained its mission and continues putting conservation on the ground throughout New Mexico, during these difficult times. Due to the historic scope of these disasters, we were honored to be visited by Chief Terry Cosby, USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Robert Bonnie, and President Biden who all came to New Mexico to witness the aftereffects of the disaster firsthand and see the great work NRCS was doing to assist those hardest hit communities.

Ultimately, NRCS New Mexico's accomplishments support these priorities set out by Secretary Tom Vilsack. We are doing our part to address climate change through climate-smart agriculture, forestry, and clean energy; to advance equity, opportunity, and rural prosperity; and to help in part tackle food and nutrition insecurity.

Looking forward, we have much work to do. But there are also many great opportunities to make lasting and significant impacts in New Mexico. As we wrap up the 2018 Farm Bill, a new Farm Bill may soon be on the horizon. What that will bring is yet to be determined, but what is certain is that NRCS will play a role in addressing some of the biggest challenges facing agriculture right now and for years to come and I am excited to be a part of conservation during this time.

We are honored to serve the agricultural producers of New Mexico and are privileged to have earned their trust and confidence as we continue "helping people help the land".

Thank you to the NRCS New Mexico team and all our partners who continuously work to create a better New Mexico.

J. Xavier Montoya,  
State Conservationist



**ROSABETH GARCIA-SAIS**  
*Assisatant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy*

rosabeth.garciasais@usda.gov  
 505-761-4411



**KENNETH BRANCH**  
*Assisatant State Conservationist for Programs*

kenneth.branch@usda.gov  
 505-761-4454



**KRIS GRAHAM CHAVEZ**  
*Assisatant State Conservationist for Field Development*

kristen.grahamchavez@usda.gov  
 505-761-4404



**JASON MARTIN**  
*North Area Conservationist*

jason.martin@usda.gov  
 505-761-4445



**ALICIA RODRIGUEZ**  
*Assisatant State Conservationist for Partnerships*

alicia.rodriguez@usda.gov  
 505-761-4421



**ELIAS GNANN**  
*State Conservation Engineer*

elias.gnann@usda.gov  
 585-201-5619



**RICK STRAIT**  
*State Soil Scientist*

richard.strait@usda.gov  
 505-761-4433



**ADRIAN TAFOYA**  
*South Area Conservationist*

adrian.tafoya@usda.gov  
 575-522-8875 ext. 115



**KENNETH ALCON**  
*State Resource Conservationist*

kenneth.alcon@usda.gov  
 505-761-4422



**CHRISHELLE JACKSON**  
*Executive Assitate to the State Conservationist*

chrishelle.jackson@usda.gov  
 505-761-4402

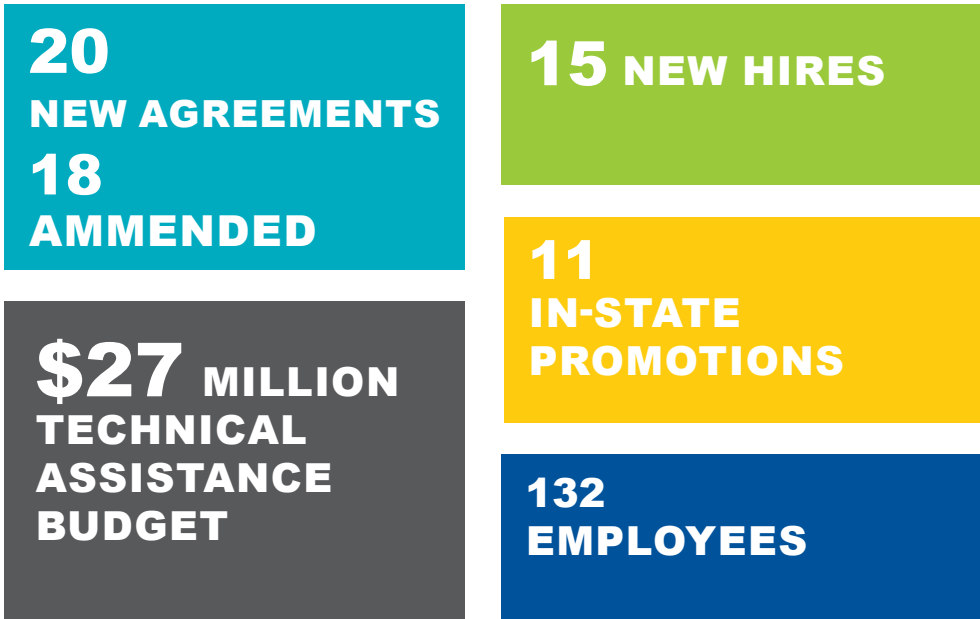
## Rosabeth Garcia-Sais

### Assistant State Conservationist for Management & Strategy

The Management & Strategy Team contributed to the overall success of NRCS New Mexico by providing operational leadership and support for the field as well as oversight and quality assurance in our processes. We helped get conservation on the ground by effectively developing and managing a technical assistance budget of over \$27 million used to support our workforce.

In April 2022, leadership returned to the workplace, followed by all employees in May. Adjusting to the new “normal” after two years of altered operations due to the pandemic. The pandemic proved that as an agency, we could effectively utilize workplace flexibilities to carry out our important work, although it also proved the importance of and impact of face-to-face interactions with our employees, partners, and customers we serve. The Management & Strategy team provided formal retirement training to employees and through the use of technology, expanded the annual pre-retirement health benefits training conducted jointly with the Social Security Administration and Blue Cross Blue Shield to all FPAC employees statewide. We also implemented the 2022-2023 Tri-State Leadership Development Program in which NRCS employees from New Mexico, Colorado, and Oklahoma receive formal training to enhance leadership skills and prepare them for future leadership opportunities.

As in previous years, grants and agreements played a major role in our conservation efforts. An unprecedented 20 new agreements were awarded with another 18 amended. We continued to utilize our partnerships with the New Mexico Department of Agriculture and the National Experienced Workforce Solutions to provide additional staffing assistance in the field. We posted 65 job opportunity announcements, resulting in 15 new hires and 11 in-state promotions, ending the year with 132 employees on board. One of the positions advertised was for the new Urban Conservationist position as Albuquerque was one of 17 cities selected to establish an Urban Conservation Office. The NRCS Urban Conservationist reported to New Mexico in December 2022!



## NRCS - New Mexico Administrative Areas and Service Centers



Resource Inventories and Assessments  
KRM, 10/5/2017  
E:\Map\_Templates\MOONM\_admin\_18.mxd



- ★ State Office - Albuquerque
- ◆ North Area Office - Albuquerque
- ◆ South Area Office - Las Cruces

## NRCS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

### Kenneth Branch

#### Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

Resilience has been the buzzword across the country as the impacts of COVID-19, climate change, and supply chain limitations have affected the health and profitability of farmers and ranchers. NRCS took action in 2022 to unprecedented inflation by encouraging flexibility with rescheduling, substituting, and deleting contract items that became too expensive for participants to implement. NRCS also provided supplementary payments for limited practices that were most affected by higher commodity prices. NRCS staff responded to fires and floods across the state with resiliency, flexibility, and empathy while working on Emergency Watershed Program (EWP), Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to protect property and restore land affected by these disasters. NRCS continues to identify and remove barriers to participation for historically underserved producers and urban farmers because increasing the diversity of farmers and the diversity of crops improves the resilience of our communities.

### ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM

New Contracts .....	332
Acres .....	893,969
Dollars .....	\$27,100,000
Contracts with Beginning Farmers/Ranchers .....	93
Contracts with Limited Resource Farmers/Ranchers .....	19
Contracts with Socially Disadvantaged Farmers/Ranchers .....	119

### Top Eight EQIP Practices Installed on the Ground in FY2022

PRACTICE	EXTENT	PROJECTS	FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
SPRINKLER SYSTEM	5,078 ACRES	85	\$4,024,876
BRUSH MANAGEMENT	34,646 ACRES	183	\$3,694,400
FOREST STAND IMPROVEMENT	1553.9 ACRES	144	\$2,316,959
FENCE	1,107,618 FEET	169	\$2,240,631
WATERING FACILITY	330 NO.	330	\$1,672,622
IRRIGATION PIPELINE	103,204.2 FEET	118	\$1,616,049
STRUCTURE FOR WATER CONTROL	1,349 NO.	297	\$1,498,729
LIVESTOCK PIPELINE	853,674 FEET	164	\$853,674



## CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS (CSP)

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provides significant financial assistance to agricultural producers to help maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns. CSP provided financial assistance to help manage lands in New Mexico with a total of \$10,367,029 in payments for fiscal year (FY) 2022 allocated to 301 CSP contracts.

**Contracts Funded in 2022: 87**

**Acres Funded in 2022: 233,392**

**2022 Contracts with Beginning Farmer/Rancher: 8**

**2022 Contracts with Socially Disadvantaged Farmer/Rancher: 15**

**2022 Dollars Obligated (for all 5 years of the contract): \$2,291,904.28**

**Total Active Contracts: 301**

**Total Acres: 4,913,955**

FY 2022 a total of 87 contracts were enrolled in CSP covering more than 2,150,181 acres.

The activities below are those that have been contracted more than 10 times in the 87 contracts.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Extent</i>
Prescribed Grazing	87	1,981,025 Acres
Incorporating "wildlife friendly" fencing for connectivity of wildlife food resources	26	34,611 Feet
Incorporating wildlife refuge areas in contingency plans for wildlife	29	99,180 Acres
Use of Body Condition Scoring for Livestock on a Monthly Basis to Keep Track of Herd Health	56	1,307,472 Acres
Structures for Wildlife	19	80 NO.

### Targeted resource concerns for 2022

#### Agland (grazed range, cropland and pasture)

Concentrated Erosion, Degraded Plant Condition, Livestock Production Limitation, Pest Pressure, Soil Quality Limitations, Source Water Depletion, Terrestrial Habitat, Wind and Water Erosion

#### Nonindustrial private forestland

Concentrated Erosion, Degraded Plant Condition, Fire Management, Inefficient Energy Use, Livestock Production Limitation, Pest Pressure, Terrestrial Habitat, Wind and Water Erosion

## CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT PROGRAMS TALLY

### Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Congresional District	Contracts Obligated	Contracted Acres	Obligation Amount
1	24	42,668.20	\$1,587,625.91
2	150	826,459.70	\$16,325,067.45
3	133	165,774.30	\$10,914,619.53
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>1,034,902.20</b>	<b>\$28,827,312.89</b>

### Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Congresional District	Contracts	Contracted Acres	Obligation Amount
1	16	165,517.10	\$2,792,367.72
2	71	881,230.60	\$15,108,392.13
3	22	139,948.30	\$2,065,652.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>1,186,696</b>	<b>\$19,966,412.66</b>

## CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS (CIG)

Since 2004, States have had the option of administering their own State-level CIG opportunities, using up to 5% of their EQIP allocation. The CIG State component is a huge part of the program, having funded more projects over the history of the program than the national component. It also allows States to target funding toward State priorities. New Mexico has consistently offered CIG funding every year and in 2022 was one of the 32 states that offered a state component. Four proposals competed for the \$50,000 of CIG funds offered. The selected project with National Audubon Society, Inc. will demonstrate the use of multispectral and three-band drone imagery for conservation planning.

In 2022, Quivira Coalition completed significant deliverables in their three CIG agreements by completing a soil health workbook, a biochar workbook, and holding numerous workshops and webinars on soil health, biochar production, and soil carbon amendments.



## AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM (ACEP)

Conservation easements provide long-term protection of land to ensure the viability of the nation’s food supply, provide habitat for wildlife, restore wetlands, and preserve other environmental benefits. Through the Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) program NRCS obligated \$118,000 in 2022 for the restoration of wetland and riparian habitats. With ACEP-ALE close to \$1.4 million was obligated to protect grasslands in eastern New Mexico. In addition, a national RCPP project was selected that will fund grassland easements across the Southern High Plains of Colorado, New Mexico, and Kansas. An RCPP project selected in 2021 made strides in 2022 toward offering easements to convert irrigated cropland to dryland to reduce pumping from the Ogallala Aquifer while maintaining agricultural production.



## EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION (EWP)

Total Cost of all EWP Agreements: \$262,606,718

Apache Creek	DSR Name	Total Cost	Sponsor
35-02-21-5035-001	Apache Creek	\$476,925	San Francisco Soil and Water Conservation District
Black Fire	DSR Name	Total Cost	Sponsor
35-02-21-5034-003	Black Fire***	\$68,560	Sierra SWCD
35-02-21-5034-002	Black Fire Grant***	\$219,000	Grant County
Calf Canyon/Hermits Peak Fire	DSR Name	Total Cost	Sponsor
35-03-22-5036-001	Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon Fire (Ariel Seeding/Mulching)	\$133,000,000	State of New Mexico (Dept of Finance and Administration)
35-03-22-5036-002	Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon Fire Phase II	\$120,699,180	State of New Mexico (Dept of Finance and Administration)
Cooks Peak	DSR Name	Total Cost	Sponsor
35-03-22-5037-001	Cooks Peak Fire	\$932,550	Colfax County
Corn Ranch/Roswell	DSR Name	Total Cost	Sponsor
35-02-22-5039-001	Corn Ranch/Roswell Flooding	\$780,000	Chaves County Flood Commission
Gila Flood	DSR Name	Total Cost	Sponsor
35-02-22-5041-001	Gila and Mimbres Flood***	\$4,563,525	Grant County
35-02-22-5041-002	Hidalgo County Flood***	\$354,400	Hidalgo County
Hondo Valley Flood	DSR Name	Total Cost	Sponsor
35-02-21-5033-001	Hondo Valley Flood	\$811,080	Lincoln County
Mcbride Fire	DSR Name	Total Cost	Sponsor
35-02-22-5038-001	Mcbride Fire and Windstorm	\$532,260	Lincoln County
Nogal Fire and windstorm	DSR Name	Total Cost	Sponsor
35-05-22-5040-001	Nogal Fire and Windstorm	\$169,238	Upper Hondo Soil and Water Conservation District

\*\*\* Approved for funding, working with sponsor to create agreement.



**Kris Graham Chavez****Assistant State Conservationist for Field Development****REGIONAL CONSERVATIONIST PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS (RCPP)**

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address.

New Mexico has been fortunate with 10 active agreements and currently working on the development of one new agreement and one renewal. Some objectives include working with acequias, forest stand improvement to reduce fire risk, phreatophyte removal, and working with producers who have federal land permits.

RCPP makes available a variety of NRCS conservation activities to help partners, agricultural producers, and private landowners address local and regional natural resource challenges. Partners apply to NRCS for RCPP project awards. Once projects are selected, NRCS works with partners to set aside a certain pool of funding for an awarded project. Producers, landowners, and partners then enter into producer contracts and supplemental agreements with NRCS to carry out agreed-to conservation activities.

NM NRCS is working with New Mexico State University on estimating the benefits and costs of alternative conservation practices and evaluating NRCS payment schedules. The five-year project focuses on two core areas: (1) identifying a systematic approach to estimating the strengths/benefits and weaknesses/costs of alternative conservation practices, including those associated with improved soil health; and (2) evaluation of NRCS payment schedules. Efforts made in each of the areas will include applied research, education, and academic training. In addition, students working on the projects along with their faculty advisors will be available to assist NRCS New Mexico staff in conducting economic analyses related to watershed projects as resources are available.



**Alicia Rodriguez**  
**Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships**

Conservation is cooperative and collaborative. It takes a team to make conservation happen. NRCS New Mexico’s sustained achievements in delivering conservation services and programs are largely attributed to our strong working relationships with many key partners, such as the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, New Mexico Coalition of Conservation Districts, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, New Mexico Department of Agriculture, local, state and federal government, acequia associations, elected and appointed officials, and of course our farmers, ranchers, tribes, and pueblos, and others who manage privately owned lands.

In 2022, NRCS New Mexico worked diligently in planning, coordinating, funding, and participating in numerous successful stakeholder events to enact NRCS’s motto, Helping People Help the Land. NRCS New Mexico continues to highlight the importance of productive working lands and healthy water while sustaining and enhancing the future of agriculture producers. Below are some of the accomplishments from FY 2020.

**USDA’s People’s Garden Initiative**

This cooperative agreement and partnership support USDA’s interest in urban agriculture and the People’s Garden Initiative. The Ilsa and Rey Garduño Agroecology Center in Albuquerque has been chosen, as one of 17 flagship gardens located in urban communities. The garden is located at the corner of Wellesley Ave and Ross Ave SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. Federal Funds \$26,900 (1 year).



**New Announcement:** The Office of Management and Budget apportionment of funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) will include funding for the USDA People’s Garden Initiative (PGI). ARPA-funded gardens will be a subset of the larger PGI. PGI ARPA funds focus on the 17 urban hubs currently designated of which Albuquerque is one of the hubs. New Mexico will receive \$150,000 in FY23.

**Luna Community College: Post-Fire Workshops for Mora and San Miguel counties**

The purpose of this cooperative agreement, between NRCS and Luna Community College, is to implement a Forest and Restoration Training program that will provide the local community with the skills they need to restore the land they know and love. Federal Funds \$54,575 (1 year).



### Sand County Foundation: NM Leopold Conservation Award

The purpose of this five-year contribution agreement, between NRCS and Sand County Foundation, is to recognize outstanding land stewardship on working lands in New Mexico through the Leopold Conservation Award program. Federal Funds \$32,500 (5 years). Total Non-Federal Funds \$50,000 (5 years).

(pictured right: Tuda Libby Crews was the winner of the first New Mexico Leopold Conservation Award.)

### New Mexico Agriculture

New Mexico Agriculture is an awareness campaign that seeks to inform New Mexicans about the positive impact of agriculture, its contributions to the state, and how farmers and ranchers conserve natural resources while producing sustainable, nutritious food. New Mexico Agriculture had 3,000 visits to the Facebook page and more than 2,500 visits to the Instagram profile where the campaign used survey-tested messages to highlight:

- farm and ranch families from across the state that produce our food, fuel, and fiber,
- technology and practices used to conserve and steward natural resources such as water and soil,
- and the diverse range of agricultural products grown in the state for local and global consumption.



The campaign’s reach, defined as the number of accounts that saw any content from or about their page, totaled more than 2.8 million on Facebook and nearly 450,000 on Instagram. The campaign will continue to work among its strategic partners to build upon this success.

### Outreach Agreements

New Mexico Agriculture in the Classroom (NMAITC) - NM Grow Project Grants. NRCS NM and New Mexico Agriculture in the Classroom are pleased to announce the twelve schools across the state that have been awarded a year-round garden kit. This is the fourth year of providing a unique grant opportunity designed to help educators and students from across the state make important connections to agriculture and natural resources. The grant provides all the materials needed for a complete 4X8 raised garden bed with a drip irrigation system and a classroom hydroponic system. Not only do classrooms get these much-needed tools to extend their curriculum, but more importantly, teachers receive specialized on-site and virtual trainings along with continual support throughout the school year on the use of materials and ways to incorporate the project across the curriculum with free Ag in the Classroom lessons and resources. Congratulations to these twelve schools receiving a NM Grow Project Grant:

Region 1 & 2: Santa Ana Head Start, Bernalillo; Algodones Elementary School, Bernalillo; McCoy Elementary, Aztec; Estancia Upper Elementary, Estancia; Robertson High School FFA, Las Vegas; Rio Gallinas School for Ecology & the Arts, Las Vegas

Region 3 & 4: Hatch Valley High School, Hatch; Mesilla Park Elementary, Las Cruces; Centennial High School FFA, Las Cruces; Sonoma Elementary First Grade, Las Cruces; Mescalero Apache High School FFA, Mescalero; Mountain View Middle School, Alamogordo



## Elias Gnann State Conservation Engineer

Between employee turnover, a State Conservation Engineer Vacancy, and wildfires, FY22 was a difficult year for NRCS NM Engineering.

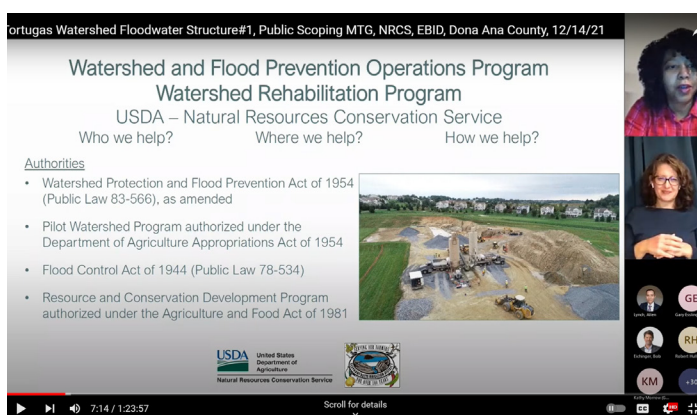
During FY22, NRCS New Mexico engineering staff supported USDA Strategic Goals by ensuring USDA programs were delivered efficiently, promptly, with integrity, and a focus on customer service. These results-focused measures align with other USDA Strategic Goals by strengthening the stewardship of private lands through technology and research and by maintaining a high-performing workforce through employee engagement and empowerment, enhancing conservation planning with science-based tools and information, promoting productive working lands, and enhancing productive agricultural landscapes.

The NRCS NM State Office Engineering Section reviewed and checked field office designs; provided design and policy guidance to field offices; completed on-farm designs, design checks, and certifications; and completed Water Management Entity (WME) site visits, surveys, and designs.

New Mexico saw both the largest and second-largest wildfires in the state’s history in FY22. NM NRCS’ swift action provided quick relief to fire and flood victims. The state hosted multiple detail Engineering positions and their help combined with many NM staff being assigned EWP work made it possible to implement millions of dollars in EWP aid in a matter of months.

The NRCS NM Regional GSU Geologist completed 113 well reports for New Mexico and Arizona. The GSU geologist also provided geotechnical oversight of the field activities on the Tortugas Dam rehabilitation project, participated on a Technical Evaluation Board for Santa Cruz River Watershed Floodwater Retarding Structure, and provided assistance to Wyoming State while their geologist position is vacant.

Watershed work with NRCS-New Mexico in FY22 including work on the Tortugas Arroyo Watershed Dam Site #1, Rincon Arroyo Watershed Project, The Belen Watershed Project, and the Santa Cruz River Watershed Dam Site #1. These projects involve rehab on existing NRCS structures and providing flood protection downstream.





## Kenneth Alcon State Resource Conservationist

The New Mexico Resource Technology Services department (RTS) oversees the NRCS Ecological Sciences department (i.e., Agronomy, Range, Wildlife Biology, Forestry, Archeology, and Business Tools). We provide technical leadership to NRCS Field and State Office staff as well as our partners. The RTS Team ensures that NRCS New Mexico has access to the latest scientific tools, technology, and training. The promotion of Soil Health by NRCS staff in New Mexico in conjunction with our various partners is a high priority for RTS because soil health is the foundation of all soil and water conservation. We ensure that our employees are prepared to provide the best technical assistance to our clients so that our clients can be the best they can be in managing their natural resources. Below are examples of our accomplishments for FY2022.

### Cultural Resources

The RTS Cultural Resources staff was busy in FY2022. The RTS cultural resource staff completed consultations and National Historic Preservation Act compliance work on 160 NRCS contracts amounting to 11,209 acres surveyed for cultural resources. The surveys identified and documented 152 cultural resources of archeological sites (prehistoric and historic), historic structures, and acequias. The RTS archeologists participated in Quality Assurance Reviews of the 7 field offices comprising Teams 1 and 10. Additionally, the staff provided a week-long training on NRCS New Mexico’s cultural resource policy and procedures to new field office staff.

In addition to normal operations, EWP Team Lead Archeologist Molly Murphy with the assistance of the CR staff worked on 7 EWP projects across the state, including the Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon Fire in Mora and San Miguel Counties, conducting and contracting archeological surveys ahead of vital emergency relief efforts. Our state was significantly affected by the fires and subsequent floods and we tried to provide immediate and effective support to ensure none of the implementations was limited by compliance regulations.

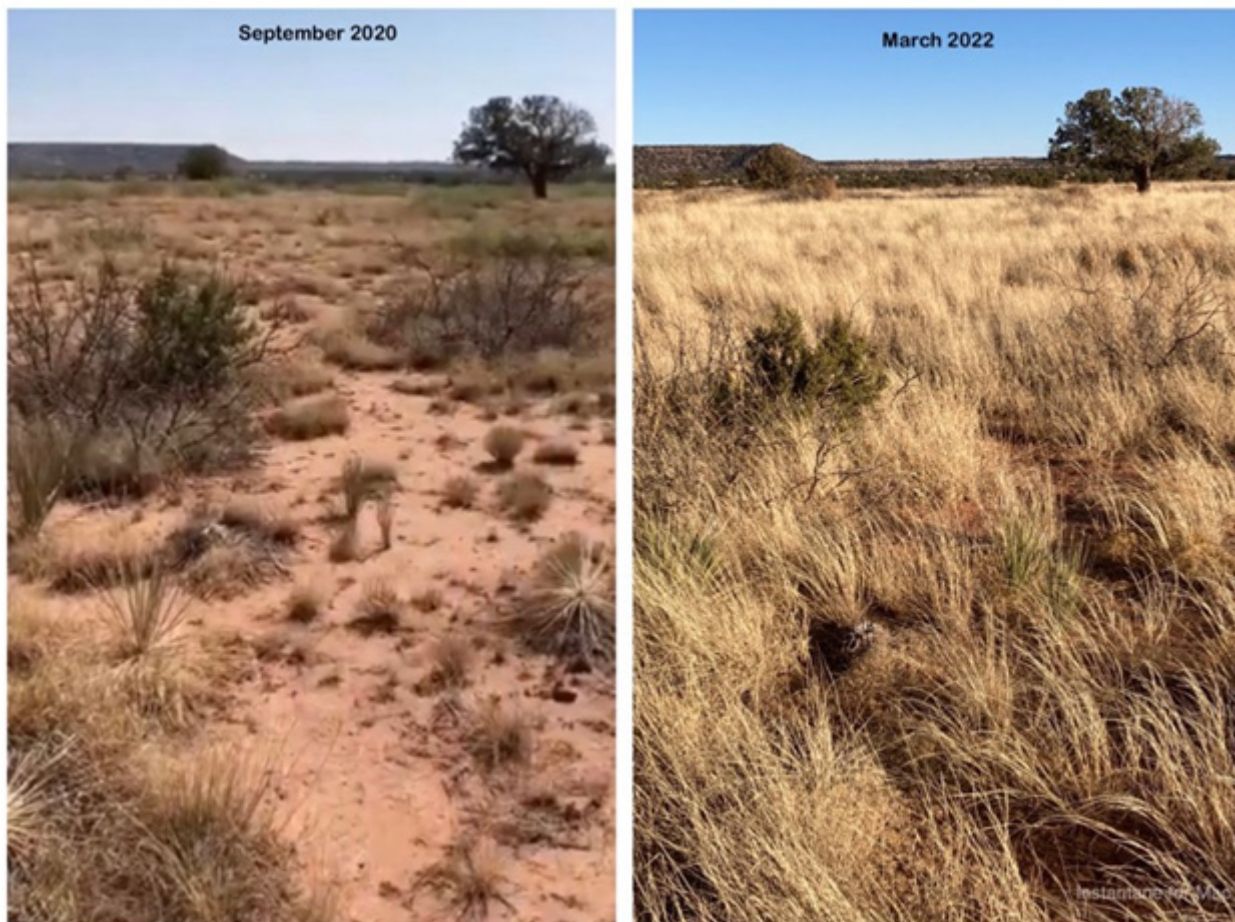
The vacant South Area Archeologist position was filled by Marcelo Weese. Mr. Weese graduated from the University of Colorado (Colorado Springs) with a B.A. in Anthropology. He previously worked for the National Forest Service (Carson National Forest in New Mexico and the Chugach National Forest in Alaska) and BLM in North Dakota.



NRCS staff excavating a 50cm-by-50cm test unit looking for cultural materials.

## Range Management and Grazing Land Conservation

New Mexico NRCS understands the importance that the Livestock Industry plays in the culture, tradition, and economics of New Mexico. With the majority of New Mexico lands being classified as rangelands (72%), and livestock grazing being the primary use on these acres, NRCS is committed to assisting New Mexico farmers and ranchers in applying conservation practices such as 314 Brush Management, 382 Fence, 516 Livestock Pipeline, and 614 Watering Facility as well as developing grazing management plans (528 Prescribed Grazing) that help farmers and ranchers achieve their conservation stewardship and livestock production goals. With 528 Prescribed Grazing being the base practice most relevant to New Mexico farmers and ranchers in the latest version of the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), NRCS assisted many New Mexico Farmers and Ranchers in the development of Prescribed Grazing management plans that help producers achieve their management goals while maintaining healthy, productive lands for future use. The Resource Technology department at NRCS is committed to ensuring that the conservation practices implemented on New Mexico lands are relevant and technically sound to the Agricultural producers of our state.



NRCS State Rangeland Management Specialist works with NM producer to plan and implement 528 Prescribed Grazing on a Ranch in Puerto de Luna, NM.

## Outreach and Education on Soil Health and Water Conservation

Conservation education for farmers and ranchers, schools, colleges, tribes, etc. is a priority. The Rainfall Simulator--in addition to the soil slake, slump and stability test--continues to be used around New Mexico, demonstrating the properties and benefits of healthy soil. Cover crops are continuing to be used more in New Mexico as producers become aware of the benefits to soil health.



NRCS State Rangeland Management Specialist briefs NRCS staff on Emergency Watershed Protection measures at Calf Canyon/Hermit's peak fire (Summer 2022).



NRCS State Rangeland Management Specialist demonstrates the Effects of Rainfall on a healthy vs. unhealthy land using Rainfall simulator in a YouTube video (Winter 2022).



NRCS State Rangeland Management Specialist giving a demonstration on soil and range health using the Rainfall Simulator at the New Mexico State Fair.



Resource Conservationist on the New Mexico Resource Technology Staff (RTS) presents information on soil and range health to ranchers and members of the Pueblo of Santo Domingo

**Rick Strait**  
State Soil Scientist

**Climate and Conservation on New Mexico's State Soil**

In Cooperation with Mckinley SWCD, Resource Inventories and Assessments staff installed a new Soil Climate Analysis Network (SCAN) station near Thoreau, NM. The new SCAN site monitors soil moisture content at several depths, air temperature, relative humidity, solar radiation, wind speed and direction, liquid precipitation, and barometric pressure. The system is designed to provide data to support natural resource assessments and conservation activities. The site was installed on Penistaja, New Mexico's State Soil.

*(Continued on next page)*



The Thoreau SCAN site shortly after installation in May, 2022.

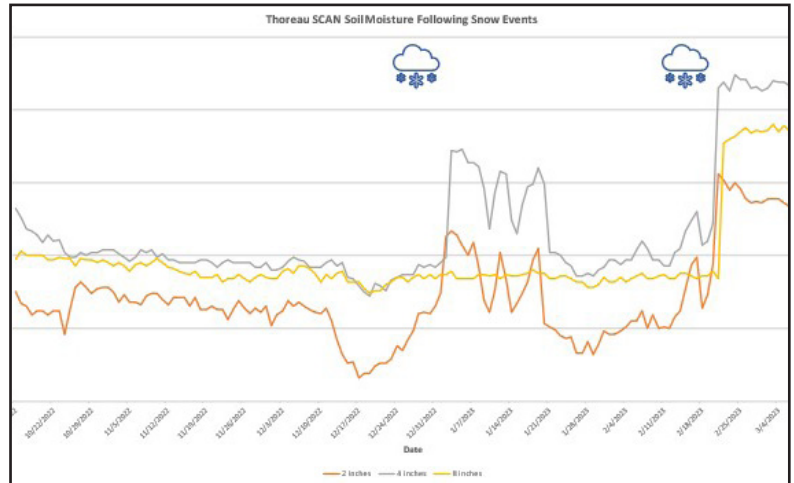
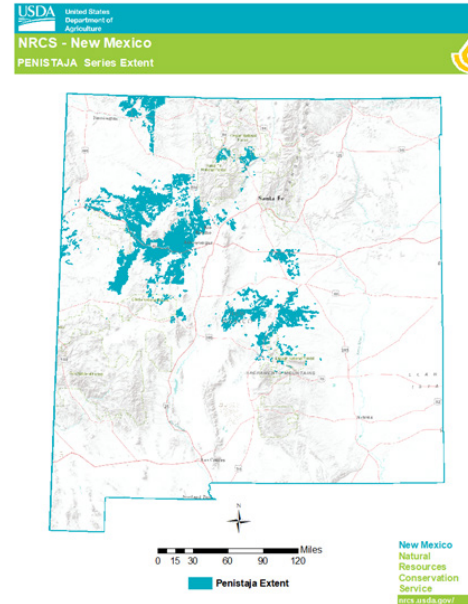


Chart showing increases in Soil Moisture following snowfall events at the Thoreau SCAN.



Current climate information for the Thoreau SCAN is available on NRCS's Interactive Map ([usda.gov](https://www.usda.gov)).

Soil moisture measurements at the Thoreau SCAN allow NRCS and cooperators to effectively monitor plant available water. Outside factors, such as runoff and sublimation, diminish the value of precipitation measurements associated with plant community health. Soil moisture measurements overcome these challenges by allowing us to focus on the amount of water that can be directly utilized by plants. The Thoreau SCAN station was installed on Penistaja, New Mexico's State Soil. Penistaja soils are highly productive rangeland soils valued for livestock grazing and wildlife habitat. These soils support robust plant communities including Blue Grama, New Mexico's state grass. Penistaja soils occur on over one million acres in New Mexico.



## Mobile Data Collection Enhances EWP Response

State GIS and Programs staff collaborated to develop and implement a data collection tool to enhance our response during 2022's historic fire season. Data was collected using mobile phones and then transmitted to computers where it was used to facilitate decision-making and increase efficiency. Sixteen separate projects were coordinated across New Mexico from Grant County to Mora and San Miguel Counties. Thirty-one EWP team members were able to access these maps with their government-issued phones and laptop computers. By wirelessly sharing geospatial data, New Mexico was better prepared to respond to the largest annual EWP workload in state history.

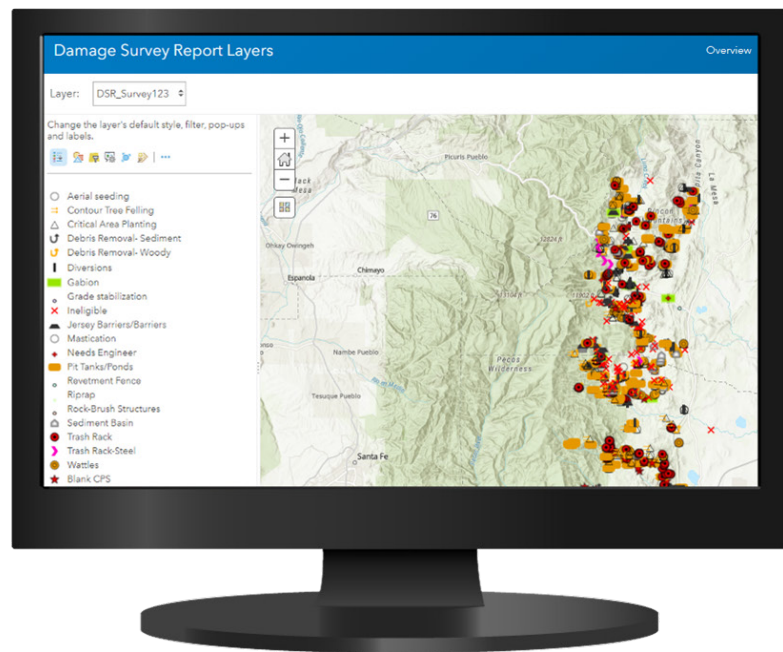
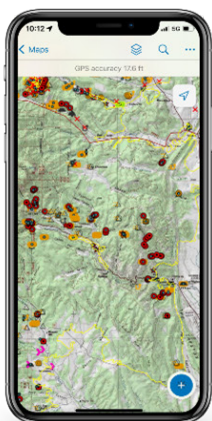


Illustration of New Mexico's EWP data collaboration system.

## Plant Materials Center Field Demonstrations

The Los Lunas Plant Materials Center (PMC) is working with each New Mexico Team to plant demonstrations across the state to illustrate long-term soil health and economic benefits of cover cropping in irrigated and dryland production systems and erosion control using PMC native grass releases. Each cover crop planting will include seven different mixes that are readily available at a low cost and easily terminated.

Two demonstration plots were established in southern New Mexico during FY22. The planting outside of Garfield, New Mexico, illustrated the benefits of cover crops in Pecan Orchard alleys. These benefits included decreasing wind erosion and improving soil biomass. A second planting near San Patricio, New Mexico focused on transitioning abandoned fields back into production. Preparations for planting cover crop demonstration plots in low-productivity pastures in northern New Mexico and herbaceous windbreaks/field borders in Eastern New Mexico are underway.



Pecan orchard cover crop planting near Garfield, New Mexico, shortly after establishment.



Biological Science Technician measuring Winter Oat cover crop plant density near Garfield, New Mexico.



Cover Crop Demonstration near San Patricio, New Mexico.



## Jason Martin, North Area Conservationist

NORTH AREA PROGRAM ACTIVITY		
	CONTRACTS	OBLIGATED AMOUNT
EQIP	176	\$11,839,025
RCPP	2	\$210,022
CSP	35	\$8,903,671

In Fiscal Year 2022, there were multiple fires and floods that also required attention, including the largest fire in New Mexico’s history. Field office employees from across the North Area coordinated with State Office and Area Office staff in 2022 to perform damage survey reports for the Emergency Watershed Program (EWP). At one time, there were 12 people on the ground performing assessments, planning with landowners, and working to determine the best way to help landowners. Tierra y Montes and Western Mora SWCD staff were crucial in getting landowner permission to perform assessments on the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire and Floods. Through these efforts, NRCS was among the first agencies on the ground to provide aid and assistance to landowners affected by disasters in New Mexico in 2022.

- Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire and Floods (Mora, San Miguel, and Taos Counties, April 6 – August 21) – 341,471 acres burned, plus post-fire flooding
- Cook’s Peak Fire (Mora & Colfax Counties, April 17 – May 18) – 59,359 acres
- Cerro Pelado Fire (Sandoval County, April 22 – June 15) – 45,605 acres
- Mitchell Fire (Harding County, April 21 – May 2) – 25,000 acres
- Midnight Fire (Rio Arriba County, June 9 – July 1) – 4,896 acres
- Rio en Medio Flood (Rio Arriba County, late August) - ~1,500 acres

## Hart Alex

### Team 3 - Success Story

The Taos NRCS field office has worked with Hart Alex through several EQIP contracts starting in 2017. In that time field staff has learned so much through the passion that Hart has for forest lands. Hart has a bachelor’s degree in biology and a master’s degree in biochemistry. Hart taught in rural Alaska for years before returning to New Mexico.

In 2015 Hart was named the NM outstanding tree farmer of the year for his work in creating a healthy forest through thinning and burning.

Hart has said through his efforts in thinning “the remaining trees have grown fatter and taller, once we open up the canopy we have ground vegetation like grass and scrubs, they get a chance to grow. That gives wild animals something to eat.” Alex is trying to recreate what the forest looked like centuries ago.

Whenever the NRCS Taos field office has new producers interested in forest stand improvement and the potential that their forest has, we send them to take a look at how Hart works.



## Success Story: Glorieta 2.0: Forest Conservation a continuation to Forestland Health

### Team 3-Success Story



Located in Santa Fe county on the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and 5 miles west of Pecos New Mexico Glorieta Camps is a Christian faith-based non-profit camp. The property is approximately 2,317 acres of Forestland that are utilized for backcountry wilderness and other multi-sport activities.

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In evaluating the need to develop a safer property for residents and guest Glorieta Camps Director of Risk Management and HR and producer Jon Malvig reached out to NRCS for program assistance, in this case through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The producer's goal was to achieve conservation forestry practices that would reduce hazardous fuel, improve access for management objectives, and reduce potential risk or harm to humans and overall forest health. These resource concerns were addressed by providing a conservation plan created by the Santa Fe field office in 2016. These practices focused on Forest Stand Improvement, Woody Residue Treatment, and Range Planting and have progressed over the years with follow-up contracts that have accomplished the producer's objectives over time.

The producer knew it was critical to mitigate wildfire at a scale that could sustain low-intensity wildfire. The strategies the New Mexico Forestry Division and NRCS suggested were to fine-tune the practices that would manipulate density and structure, reduce potential pest and moisture stress, and restore natural plant communities and wildlife habitats. The slash treatment method to these practices varied from lop and scatter, mastication, to piling and burning, and chipping and removal. Forest cover types included pinon, juniper, ponderosa pine, and douglas fir.

**Practices in Action:**

The management plan for Glorieta 2.0 contracts consisted of a mix of chipping and piling and burning. The photo to the left shows a fire crew completing day 1 of piling and burning 13 acres. The specifications for this method of placing slash into piles were well suited to adequate spacing, and pile size. Natural conditions, such as time of the season, and wind, are typically considered when this practice is implemented. Through the EQIP program, a total of 149 acres have been completed by the pile and burn method.

After forest thinning and treatment are properly applied, the results are open spaces between trees, reduction of dense understory, and a good diversity by size class. In addition to Forest Stand Improvement and Woody Residue treatment, Range Planting practice was included on the first contracts that assisted with establishing plant communities (blue grama, sideoats grama, and slender wheatgrass) providing plant cover and part of the operation and maintenance of practices.

**From the Producer:**

The work we have done in forest thinning, pile burning, and restoration with help from NRCS and NM State Forestry has helped ease our concern for the potential losses our property would incur from a catastrophic wildfire.

Not only do we feel good about reducing the fuel in the forest surrounding our property but we have also seen an increase in wildlife and native vegetation in the treated areas. It's nice to see the forest getting back to a more native and fire-adapted condition. - Jon Malvig



Dense understory before forest thinning.



Woody residue treatment: piling and burning.



After forest thinning treatment.



## Adrian Tafoya, South Area Conservationist

SOUTH AREA PROGRAM ACTIVITY				
	CONTRACTS	ACRES	OBLIGATION AMOUNT	PAYMENT AMOUNT
<b>EQIP</b>	156	558,908	\$15,322,054	\$2,521,334
<b>RCPP-EQIP</b>	4	40,847	\$819,369	\$244,196
<b>RCPP-CSP</b>	5	91,466	\$1,000,000	\$115,000
<b>CSI-GCI</b>	3	696	\$48,253	\$9,649
<b>CSP Renewals</b>	11	159,174	\$1,745,953	\$222,628
<b>CSP Classic</b>	41	1,285,464	\$8,384,874	\$346,293

## Sosa Brings Innovative Farming to Carlsbad Community

Team 10- Success Story

Mr. Rey Sosa first stepped foot into the Carlsbad USDA Service Center in March of 2020 right before we shut down for Covid. He had just moved to Carlsbad from Houston, Texas to be closer to his family in Hobbs. Mr. Sosa had aspiring conservation dreams and was very open to innovative agriculture. He had purchased a Seasonal High Tunnel on his own and was learning the ins and outs of utilizing them in the desert, especially during the windy season.

He started his journey with NRCS by applying for a second seasonal high tunnel through our Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) but was unsuccessful in securing funding. District Conservationist, Raquel Chacon, recognized an opportunity to present this project to Carlsbad SWCD as an Innovative Conservation Community Project and contacted immediately. With the help of Rocky Gonzales, a soil conservationist, and the wonderful people at Carlsbad SWCD, Mr. Sosa’s project was accepted and funded. His farm improvements didn’t stop there.

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Rey purchased a drip irrigation system on his own and has been successful since 2020 in growing crops in his original seasonal high tunnel using hard water (650-1300 ppm) with an alkaline pH and has not had any issues in his lines. That wasn't enough to combat the scorching heat in Carlsbad, so he added different levels of shade cloth and dialed in his production even more by making the climate 10+ degrees cooler. He has increased his production by at least 50% and lengthened his growing season considerably.

Though he was not successful in receiving NRCS funding for his high tunnel, Mr. Sosa kept his EQIP application active. He adjusted his plan to include an irrigation system for his field and small orchard and opted to implement cover crops under the program which was awarded funding in 2021.

Rey has since set up the second high tunnel, funded through Carlsbad SWCD which also includes a drip irrigation and shade cloth, and looks to take full advantage of a long 2023 growing season producing an assortment of microgreens, tomatoes, squash, carrots, onions, eggplants and more!

His small 2.5-acre farm continues to thrive. Being the land steward that he is, Rey also has a few pigs, goats, and sheep, and has implemented a rotation of his chicken coop to spread the manure. He is currently working on a plan to implement Odorless Pig Technology to create a no-smell pig pen by building a Natural Farming Inoculated Deep Litter System.

Mr. Sosa has since brought his farm products to market which can be purchased at our local Thursday Farmers Market from July through September or through local online orders. He has even helped sponsor the Village of Loving FFA program through their fundraiser by providing homegrown organic veggies and micro greens.



## Carzalia Valley Farms - Columbus, New Mexico

### Team 7- Success Story

James Johnson has 3,100 Ac in Cropland and grows onions, cotton, pecans, pistachios, watermelon, pumpkins, spinach, and lettuce. James has been using subsurface drip irrigation for 30 years and is one of the most progressive farmers in Southern NM for soil health.

James is participating in the CSP program utilizing reduced tillage and cover crop practices. He also participates in EQIP and EQIP-Organic to keep his farm operating with the most efficient irrigation systems paired with irrigation water management.

James sponsored a soil health workshop for NRCS partners, the Quivira Coalition, and NMACD in 2022.

James is currently trying to convert his operation from chemical fertilizers and pesticides to a biological crop support program.



## Wetlands Reserve Easement- Bosquecito Area

Team 8- Success Story

### Overview:

This project began several years ago as the Rhodes family became interested in restoring and enhancing their wetland area that had been previously used for livestock grazing. They entered into an easement agreement on around 500 acres. The main goals are to restore the wetland along the Rio Grande River and improve wildlife habitat. Wildlife habitat improvements are specifically focused on the southwestern willow flycatcher and the yellow-billed cuckoo but will result in a benefit to a diverse number of native wildlife species and migratory birds. Restoration began with removing/suppressing invasive species and will result in revegetation with native species. The continued success of this project is attributed to the dedication and collaboration of all partners involved.

### Partners Include:

- Rhodes Family
- USDA NRCS
- Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)
- SWCA Environmental Consultants
- Audubon Society
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

### Priorities Addressed:

- Impairment of wetland function
- Decline in water quality and quantity
- Increase in invasive woody and herbaceous species
- Decreased biological diversity
- Decline in habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife species

### Projects Planned/Being Implemented:

- Brush Management- Cut/stump and base spray treatments targeting salt cedar, Russian olive, and honey mesquite using Garlon 4
- Herbaceous Weed Treatment- Foliar chemical application targeting Russian knapweed using Milestone
- Fence & Prescribed Grazing- involves installing/ repairing fence along easement boundaries and deferring grazing and then utilizing grazing as a tool to facilitate restoration efforts
- Tree/Shrub Planting- a project being completed by SWCA involves pole plantings of willows in open areas to encourage revegetation
- Monitoring Wells- drilled shallow wells in key locations to regularly monitor water levels
- Riparian Forest Buffer- project completed by BOR to control invasive species and plant native species
- Critical Area Planting- the planting of native herbaceous species following salt cedar removal planned



## Leona Wear - 10 Canyons Ranch

Team 9- Success Story

Leona Wear began her conservation journey with the NRCS in the summer of 2018. Over the last five years, she and her family have improved the range condition and wildlife habitat of their ranch home. The ranch encompasses the headwaters of Berrenda Creek along with several springs and varies from low canyons and rolling hills to high peaks that border the Black Range of the Gila National Forest. Wear’s operation is home to not only their livestock herd, but black bear, mule deer, elk, and many other wildlife species.

Leona utilized EQIP to increase her conservation efforts. She not only greatly increased the livestock water system on the expansive land area, but also incorporated brush management to reduce encroaching stands of piñon-juniper and rabbit bush and erosion control measures such as a pond to reduce damaging overland flows. The ability to increase grazing control was a priority in planning, so pastures were developed by installing several miles of fence, much of which was in difficult terrain. Leona Wear has seen great improvements to her operation, for both livestock and wildlife, so much so that she was even named Conservationist of the Year by the Caballo SWCD.





## New Mexico Civil Rights Advisory Committee

We are a diverse group of people serving a diverse group of people. New Mexico’s culture and tradition make it one of the world’s most diverse places. We take our responsibility of being fair, transparent, honest, and accountable very seriously. One of the tools we use to ensure this is the Civil Rights Advisory Committee or CRAC. The CRAC’s charter is designed to assure that we are following federal laws, civil rights policies, and national and state objectives and advises the state conservationist on all Equal Opportunity Employment (EEO) and program delivery related matters. The CRAC promotes education, awareness, and outreach of all the Special Emphasis Programs.

Numerous recruitment and outreach events took place throughout the state. Two Quality Assurance Reviews were completed, for Team 1 and Team 10. And Training was given to all employees on Filing a Discrimination Complaint as a USDA Employee.

Civil Rights Employee of the Year: New Mexico recognizes an employee who has contributed during the fiscal year, and who advances civil rights program in one or more of the following areas: outreach, improvement of services in programs to underrepresented groups and employment. The New Mexico Civil Rights Employees of the year for fiscal year 2022 were Fawanna Lee and Tatjana Mercado. Fawanna Lee is the Soil Conservationist and Lead Planner for the Team 1 Gallup, NM field office, and the Asian American/Pacific Islander Special Emphasis Program Manager on the Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC). Tatjana Mercado is the Range Management Specialist for the Team 1 Gallup, NM field office.



Diversity Day, A Pacific Island Experience in Palau – Our Resource Conservationist did a 120-day detail through the Embassy Science Fellows program. This was a great opportunity to highlight the experience not only on assessing soil health in the agricultural areas of Palau but to also talk about the history and culture of the people.



In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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# NRCS Service Centers

NRCS Office	(Current as of 2019)
Alamogordo	(575) 437-3100
Albuquerque	(505) 761-5447
Aztec	(505) 334-3090
Carlsbad	(575) 887-3506
Carrizozo	(575) 648-2941
Chama	(575) 756-2581
Clayton	(575) 374-9461
Clovis	(575) 762-4769
Crownpoint	(505) 786-7094
Cuba	(575) 289-3278
Datil	(575) 772-5722
Deming	(575) 546-9692
Estancia	(505) 384-2272
Fort Sumner	(575) 355-2448
Gallup	(505) 722-4357
Grants	(505) 287-4045
Hernandez	(505) 753-3508
Las Cruces	(575) 522-8775
Las Vegas	(505) 425-3594
Lordsburg	(575) 542-9141
Los Lunas	(505) 865-4643
Lovington	(575) 396-5857
Mora	(575) 387-2424
Mountainair	(505) 847-2941
Portales	(575) 356-6629
Raton	(575) 445-9571
Roswell	(575) 622-8746
Roy	(575) 485-2294
Santa Fe	(505) 471-0410
Santa Rosa	(575) 472-5401
Silver City	(575) 388-1569
Socorro	(575) 835-1710
Taos	(575) 758-3863
T or C	(575) 894-2212
Tucumcari	(575) 461-3801
State Office	(505) 761-4400
	(800) 410-2067



# Conservation Planning



**Conserving New Mexico's  
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**Helping People Help the Land**

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